



A Perfect Match



LEVEL 3

Written by **Ramendra Kumar** / Illustrated by **Niloufer Wadia**

‘A Perfect Match’ by Ramendra Kumar

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“The Jalebis are the best!” Dadaji said, his whiskers bristling.

“No, way! They are no match for my Halwas!” Dadiji replied, her nose twitching like an inquisitive rabbit’s.

“That’s what you think,” Dadaji said, his voice rising a notch or two.

“That’s what I know,” Dadiji declared, striking a combative pose.

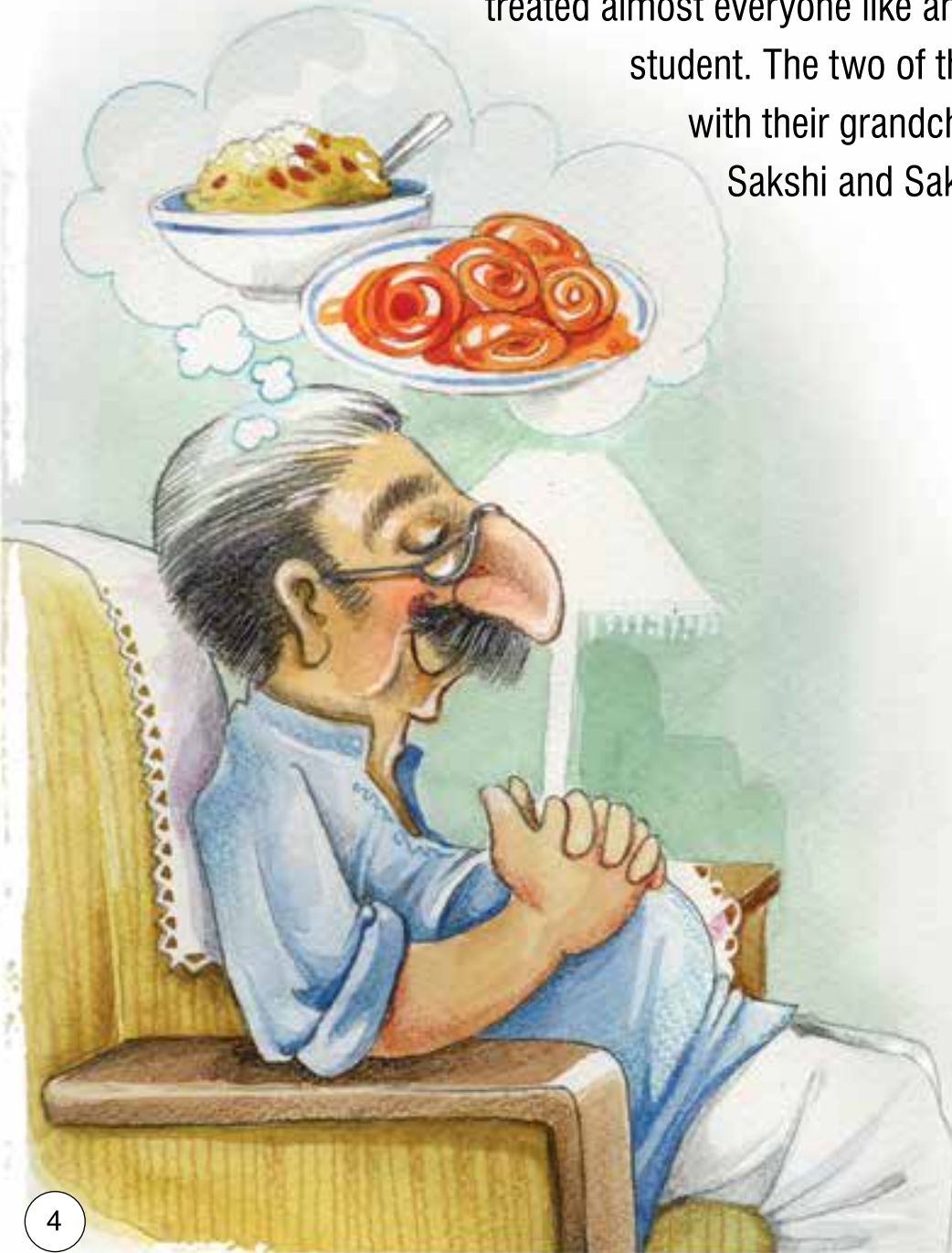
“Okay then, let’s have a match! That is, if you and your Halwas are not scared,” Dadaji dared.

“Of course I am not. You decide the date and time and my Halwas will be there to take on your Jalebis.”

“Great, then let us have the match on the coming Sunday at 4 pm,” said Dadaji.

“Done. I’ll tell the Halwas, the would-be winners, and you can inform the Jalebis, the soon-to-be quitters,” Dadiji said, and before her husband could think of a suitable retort, disappeared from the room.

Dadaji was a tall, well built man who carried his sixty-five years rather well. He had retired as a manager from a leading bank. Dadiji was of medium height, thin but with the energy of a beehive. She had been a school principal most of her life and treated almost everyone like an errant student. The two of them lived with their grandchildren, Sakshi and Saket.





The kids played hockey in their campus regularly. An abandoned park had been divided into two ‘fields’ – one for the boys, Dadiji’s Halwas, and the other for the girls, Dadaji’s Jalebis. Dadaji was a diabetic and kept fantasizing about sweets which he was forbidden to eat. He had named the teams after his favourite dishes and the names had become an instant hit.

Every evening Dadaji and Dadiji watched their respective teams practise. The two acted as the mentors as well as the cheerleaders.

“What? A match with the Jalebis?” exclaimed Narender, the skipper of the Halwas.

“We can’t play with a bunch of girls. We’ll be called sissies for the rest of our lives,” added Rajesh, the goalkeeper.

“Come on Dadiji, how do you expect us to play with females! They are all so snooty,” declared Joe, the left back.

“You rascal, don’t forget, I am a female too! And don’t you dare call me snooty,” Dadiji said, pulling Joe’s rather large left ear.

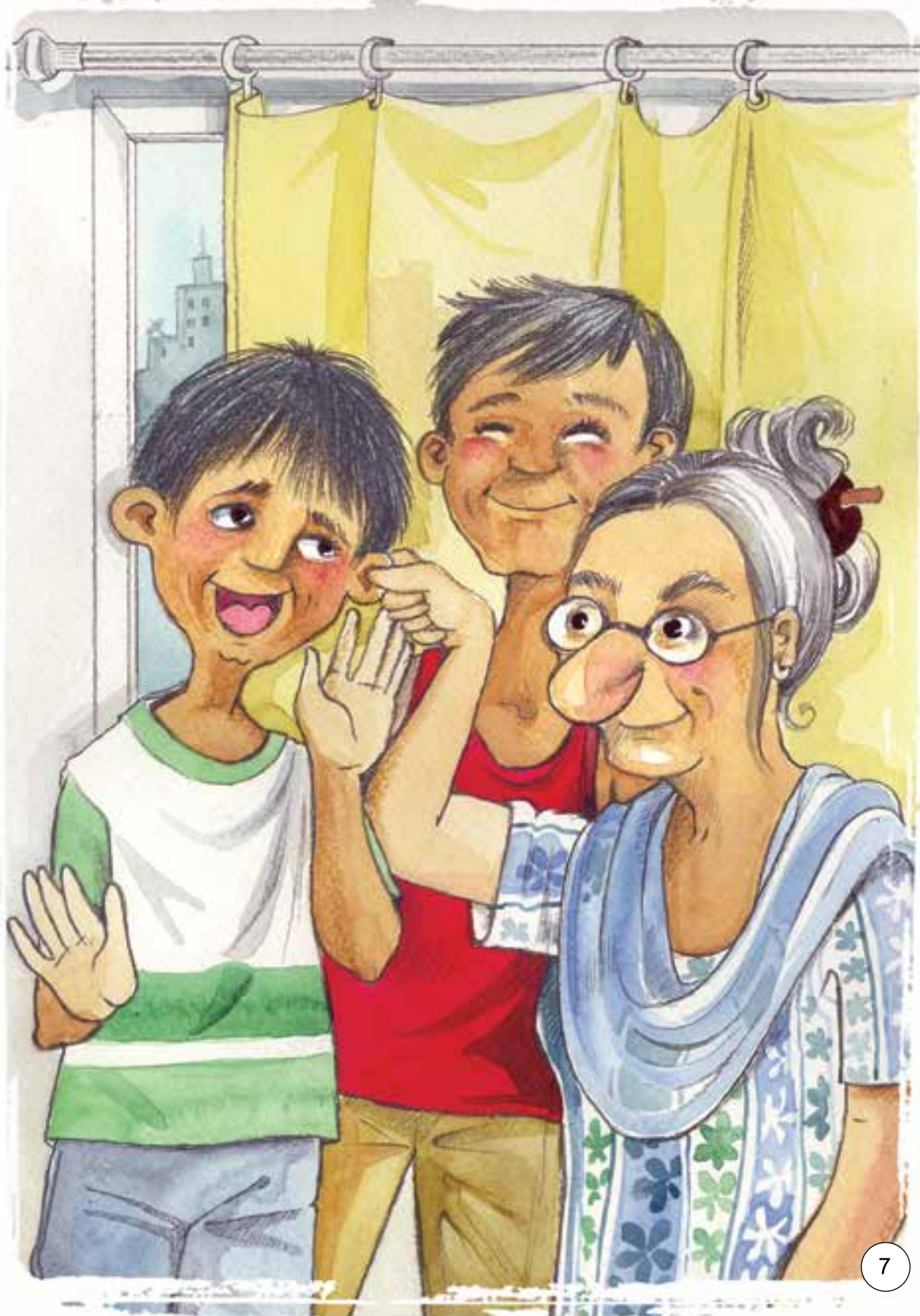
“But Dadi, you are not a female, you are Dadi Dear,” Saket said, putting his arms around her neck and giving her a peck.

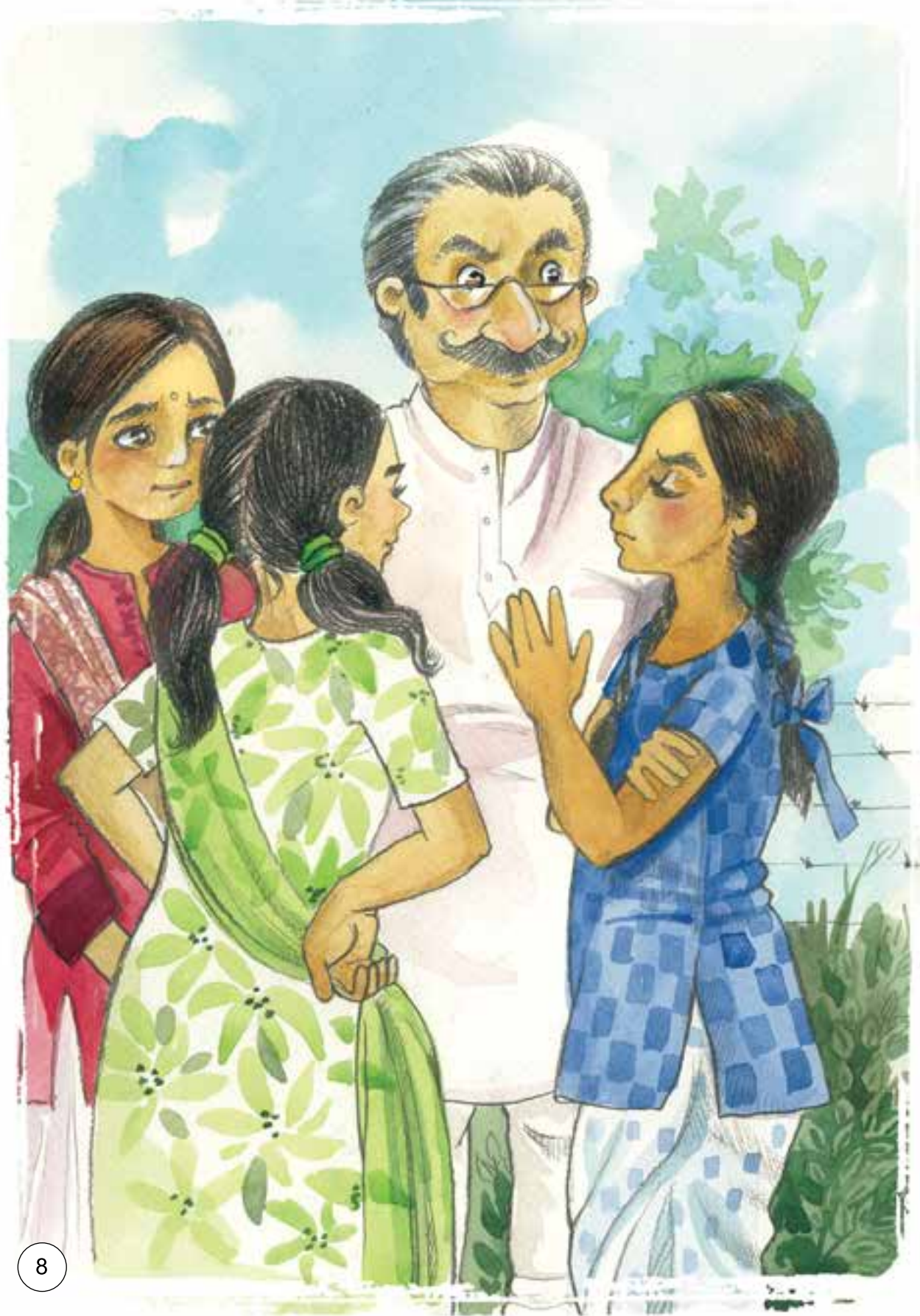
Dadiji smiled a radiant smile and then quickly rearranging her features, said, “So, the Halwas are scared of a bunch of snooty and stuck-up girls, is it? You feel they are going to make actual halwa out of you?”

“Of course not,” the boys chorused.

“We can play them anytime, anywhere,” Narender said.

“Bring them on, Dadi,” yelled Rajesh, flexing his non-existent muscles.





“Did I hear you right, Dadaji? You want us to play with the Halwas?” Geetika, the vice-captain of the Jalebis asked, her hands on her hips.

“Yes my dear, you heard right.”

“Dadaji, how can you even dream that we would agree to play with those ill-mannered louts?” asked Rehana, whose twin brother Roshan was a part of the Halwas.

“We’ve got far better things to do than to test our superior talent with the inferior ability of those unruly ruffians,” Sakshi declared.

“That means my brave Jalebis are afraid that the Halwas would beat them to pulp.”

“Ha! Come on, Dadaji, the Jalebis afraid of boys? We can crush them effortlessly! What do you say, girls?” Sara, the captain shouted, looking around for support.

With a medley of shouts and yells, the girls got into a huddle, while Dadaji smiled smugly behind his thick whiskers.



The stage was set for the epic battle between the Halwas and Jalebis. Dadiji who had represented her college in hockey taught the Halwas a few more skills. Dadaji who had studied management brought his team building and planning talents to the fore.

Dadaji used to go for a walk in the park every morning with more than a dozen of his friends. Dadiji had attended dance classes where she had learnt contemporary dance with twenty others.

The two mentors had invited their friends and dance-mates to cheer their teams. Besides, the parents and some of the teachers were also in attendance to watch this clash of the Titans. Even the peanut vendor and the ice cream seller who sold their wares in the market had shifted to the venue of the mother of all matches.





The whistle blew and the game began. From the word go the Jalebis attacked with fury while the Halwas defended ably. Ten minutes later, the tables turned and the see-saw battle continued. There was no goal in the first half. None in the second half either. Extra time followed.

As the match progressed the supporters from both sides cheered, shouted and sometimes jeered. Dadiji, looking natty in a pink salwar, almost lost her voice half way through the match. Dadaji, on the other hand, kept plucking the hair from his whiskers in sheer tension and, but for the dirty looks Dadiji gave him, would have probably had a hairless upper lip by the time the match went into extra time. On a couple of occasions the language used by Dadiji made her husband's cheeks turn the colour of her salwar. The spectators took a break from watching the pulsating match to stare at Dadaji and Dadiji who seemed to be in their element.

In the ninth minute of extra time, Sara the sharpest forward in the team, blocked a pass from Jyoti, the defender, dribbled past three boys and slammed the ball into the goal.

Dadaji jumped in the air and planted a sloppy kiss on Dadiji's cheek making her blush and almost making her forget the tragedy that had struck the Halwas.

However, the Halwas got back into the game with a vengeance. Joe passed the ball to Saket who raced down the right flank and flicked it to Narender. The captain saw Shailaja, the goalkeeper rushing towards him. He simply dodged her and gently tapped the ball into the goal.

Dadiji did a combination of a samba, disco and break dance, much to the delight of the spectators.

Soon the excitement had reached a feverish pitch. With just a minute to go, both teams were going all out to score.



The ball was with Rehana and as she passed the ball to Geetika, a dark shape suddenly streaked across the field. It was Toofan, Sakshi and Saket's pet dog. He was short and sturdy, and was the fastest thing on four legs in the vicinity. He loved playing ball but for the last week he had been denied any access to it. Every time he tried going near it either Sakshi or Saket had hurled instructions to the contrary.

He had been waiting in the wings patiently, looking ever so longingly at the white, round piece of fun. Now suddenly it was within reach and he made a dash for it, grabbed it in his mouth and disappeared into the bushes around the hockey field. He kept moving, crossing the adjoining park where Dadaji walked, the place where Dadiji danced, and straight to the spot where he knew his best friend, Aandhi would be waiting for him.





Meanwhile, the Halwas and Jalebis dropped their hockey sticks and ran after Toofan. They looked for him in the bushes, behind trees, under benches, inside dustbins, between legs and everywhere else they could.



Rehana and Roshan, Jyoti and Narender, Shailaja and Joe formed impromptu teams and searched every nook and corner. Sakshi and Saket yelled themselves hoarse shouting, screaming, coercing, coaxing and cajoling Toofan to come out in the open.

Finally they gave up.

“Does anyone have a spare ball?” asked Dadaji.

Everyone shook their heads.

Now the all important question remained:
who was the winner?



“It is a tie,” declared Dadaji.

“I think both the Halwas and Jalebis have played exceptionally well and they both deserve to win,” nodded Dadaji. “I am going to present each player with a t-shirt,” he declared.

“And I am going to host a feast for them. We can have a picnic tomorrow on this very ground,” added Dadaji.

The announcements were greeted with hoots and yells. Forgetting their animosity and rivalry the Halwas and Jalebis indulged in high fives.

“But Dadaji, if both our teams are winners who is the ‘Man of the Match’?”

“We do not have a ‘Man of the Match’, but we do have a ‘Champ of the Match’ and he is none other than the canny canine – Toofan. He gets my vote for providing a perfect ending to a perfect match,” Dadaji said and everyone laughed.





Pratham Books was set up in 2004, as part of the Read India movement, a nation-wide campaign to promote reading among children. Pratham Books is a not-for-profit organization that publishes quality books for children in multiple Indian languages. Our mission is to see "a book in every child's hand" and democratize the joy of reading. If you would like to contribute to our mission, please email us at info@prathambooks.org.



An award winning author, Ramendra Kumar has written 27 books for children, ranging from picture books to YA fiction, including *Paplu*, *the Giant* for Pratham Books. His work has been translated into several Indian and foreign languages and have found a place in text books in India and abroad. He is also an inspirational speaker and storyteller.



Niloufer Wadia is an artist who has started illustrating seriously after spending 20 years in the field of advertising. She is keen to explore various media to communicate her thoughts and feelings.

When the Halwas and the Jalebis were playing against each other, it was more than just a hockey match. It was a game full of delectable thrills where talent, team work and team management were on full display. Add a dash of the unexpected and you have what can only be called a perfect match!

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